

# 55. Jesus in 2 Timothy

March 1, 2018

It is doubtful that we could find a more emotional and nostalgic letter written by the apostle Paul than this one. After all, he was all alone in a cold, dark, and damp Roman dungeon and did not know if he would have another day on earth. It seems as though his life totally depended on a flip of the crazy Roman emperor Nero's thumb.

Nero wanted to be known to everyone as a great emperor with poems and music. But he was known as a serious sociopath murderer and an enemy of Christianity for all the persecutions he committed against the believers of Jesus Christ.

I cannot turn to 2 Timothy without trying to picture myself as a silent observer in the apostle Paul's dungeon cell. In my mind's eyes, I can see this old man wrapping his cloak around his shoulders a little tighter to stay a little warmer for the night under a flickering candle light. I can even hear him cough, wheeze, and groan as well as watch his tears quietly rolling down on his deeply lined face and sighing as he feels the loneliness of being separated from his friends.

## A. THE AUTHOR AND THE TIMELINE

*2 Timothy 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus,*

Here is the last letter by a rugged, yet tired warrior, the apostle Paul. It's an essential piece of biblical literature we need in order to construct an accurate and complete mental portrait of Paul and a spiritual understanding of our times.

Many Bible students believe that this letter was written 66-67 A.D. shortly before Nero's death. Nero ordered Paul's execution before his own death by suicide which he was too cowardly to do himself. He needed help from a servant.

By the time Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy, the young pastor had been ministering to the church at Ephesus for four years, and it had been almost that long since he had received his first letter from Paul.

## B. THE THEME OF THE BOOK

I find this pastoral letter from Paul "to encourage, warn, and charge Timothy regarding God's truth." It is Paul's Swan Song, his last will and testament. He was coming to his final end here on earth.

In his own words, he "fought the good fight" and "finished the race" and "kept the faith." Rather than simply to die in obscurity and silence, Paul chose to write a final note to his spiritual son, his protege, Timothy. He wanted to pass the baton, if you will, to his successor who was pastoring in Ephesus. Timothy was not having an easy ministry in that place as we studied before. But then again, who has an easy pastoral ministry anywhere if he is following the Lord Jesus wholeheartedly and teaching the Word of God faithfully?

## C. LOCATION

Nowhere in this letter does the apostle mention the location he was writing from, but many reliable biblical scholars believe that it was the ancient Mamertine Prison in Rome – a dreadful and horrible underground dungeon.

Can you imagine yourself spending any length of time in this hole? No windows to look outside, no companionship, nothing except just a cold, little cell that would have been especially hard to bear for an aging man in winter.

According to the Scripture, the situation was worse. He was bound like a criminal. I like New International Version's rendering better:

*NIV 2 Timothy 2:9 for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained.*

The Roman emperor Nero had been slowly descending into madness since his ascent to the throne in AD 54, a process exacerbated by the great fire of Rome in AD 64 that burned half the city. With the residents of Rome in an uproar, Christians became a convenient target for Nero, who used believers as scapegoats for his city's own lack of preparedness. Paul was one of those caught up in this persecution and was beheaded by Roman officials soon after writing this letter.

#### **D. THE LETTER FROM HIS HEART, NOT HEAD ONLY**

The second letter to Timothy offers a picture of Paul at the end of his ministry, just before his death. Certain personal details in the letter reveal a man settling his accounts and preparing for the inevitable. At the close of the letter, Paul mentioned a significant number of people – some who had wronged him and others who had served faithfully alongside him according to 4:9–21. It is as if Paul were giving Timothy a “state of the church” address, updating Timothy of the current state of their acquaintances and friends so that the young pastor could carry on after Paul's departure.

In addition to that horrible place, he was lonely. We've never been imprisoned in a dungeon as a criminal, certainly not suffering for our faith as Paul did. Here you can feel his loneliness in this paragraph:

*2 Timothy 4:9-13 Be diligent to come to me quickly; 10 for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica—Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia. 11 Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry. 12 And Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. 13 Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come—and the books, especially the parchments.*

He felt a profound sense of being abandoned. Yet the Lord has not abandoned Paul. We see more emotion of this great apostle in v21:

*2 Timothy 4:21 Do your utmost to come before winter.*

I really don't think we should pass hurriedly over the feelings woven through a passage like this. I want you to remember a lonely place you have been in your life. Maybe it was a time when you've felt cold and forgotten. Perhaps you saw yourself as removed from the scene, placed on a shelf, alone, and useless. Maybe you're there right now. While in that place, it's very easy for us to feel completely abandoned, overlooked, and isolated.

At times like that, how desperately we need friends! We have the Lord, but we need friends. The grace of God is magnificent, but it does not turn us into Superman or Wonder Woman. God's faithfulness and mercy do not deliver us from our human needs – needs like companionship and intimacy – the need to belong, to love, and to be loved. Loneliness is a terrible thing with which to cope.

## **E. THREE REASONS WHY PAUL WROTE THIS LETTER**

### **1) To equip Timothy for a tough task**

Timothy was to pick up the baton of proclaiming, guarding, and preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul was prepared to hand that baton off in the relay before he died. Timothy was to take it and run with it with all his might during the time he himself had left on earth.

### **2) To stir up and to encourage Timothy**

Timothy had three things working against him. He was young; he was prone to sickness; he was passive by nature – timid and fearful may be better words. And so Paul wrote to stir him up and to tell him not to lay back, but to develop his gifts and do the job with all the strength he could muster.

Paul understood that the ministry would only become more difficult for Timothy with the apostle's impending death. Indeed, at some point after this letter from Paul, Timothy was imprisoned for his faith according to Hebrews 13:23.

I can understand how timid and fearful Timothy was. When I started a prison ministry in 1988 at the AZ State Prison Tucson Complex, I just started to go into the prison as a fellow believer in Christ every Saturday night. Then about a year later, the Lord put me in the spot where I could not escape, but to teach the Word of God. I was fearful and timid. But one thought comforted me – "They are a captive audience." For the next 11 years, that was my Bible College and Seminary where I learned to study the Bible and to teach it in an expository manner.

From 1996, I started to fill in for other Calvary Chapel pastors in AZ while they were on their vacations. You may wonder why they did. It was because I was available and they didn't have to pay me anything. I probably had a cardboard sign somewhere that said, "Will teach the Bible for food."

Finally, the Lord spoke to my heart and confirmed it through others that I was to start a church in Sahuarita. For the first few years, in my weakness, I was timid, fearful, and had a lot of complexes about not having degrees from a Bible college and Seminary. To make the matter worse, the Lord chose a guy with broken English. What combination could be worse to think of it humanistically! If anything good comes out of this church, you know that it is from the Lord, not me.

Some of you may say, "You don't look timid anymore." The Lord toughens my spiritual skin a lot last 18 years and makes me realize that I am called to be a pastor by the Lord. I've been shunned, put down, jeered at, gossiped, including for not having degrees from a Seminary. Now, I chuckle and try to let it roll over my back. Sometimes, it still gets to me, but not like before.

Listen, if you are disappointed that your pastor does not have a degree from a fancy seminary, I am sorry that you feel that way. You have two choices: You can see how God uses a foolish thing of the world to confound the wise or you can leave and find someone who has a fancy certificate on the wall.

By the way, if that is your mindset, I suggest you not read any of the OT and NT Books of the Bible, including the four Gospels, with the exception of Paul's letters. Because none of the authors of the Bible, including Jesus, have a seminary degree.

Don't get me wrong, I am NOT against seminary or Bible college degrees. If you have them, good for you. But that is not THE qualification to be a pastor. The real qualifications are listed in 1 Timothy and Titus.

The most striking feature of Paul's encouragement comes when the aging apostle used a phrase that showed up prominently in his letter to Timothy four years prior. In that earlier letter, Paul exhorted Timothy to "fight the good fight" in 1 Timothy 1:18 and 6:12. But in this letter, Paul turned that phrase on himself, writing that he had "fought the good fight... finished the course... and kept the faith" in 2 Timothy 4:7. What a great encouragement it must have been to the young pastor of the church at Ephesus to know that his mentor boldly modeled his perseverance in the faith, even to the point of death.

### **3) To wrap up some final personal matters before his death**

Paul had some needs to communicate to Timothy, and he did so in a powerfully transparent way in his final requests and greetings.

## **F. THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK**

I find a key verse from each chapter:

### **1) Hold fast**

*2 Timothy 1:13 Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.*

Everything Paul wrote in chapter 1 had to do with this great mandate.

### **2) Endure hardship**

*2 Timothy 2:3 You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*

Paul was telling Timothy, in effect, to roll up his sleeves and prepare for a battle: "if you think it's bad now, hang on. It will only get worse. Endure. Be tough. Be strong."

### **3) Continue**

*2 Timothy 3:14 But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them*

Paul was urging Timothy to continue in his effort of preserving the same message he preached before. He doesn't need anything new, or clever, or cute. Like an old song says, "An old time religion, good enough for me."

### **4) Preach the Word**

*2 Timothy 4:2 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.*

Preach the Word of God – not a man's opinion with allegorical interpretations that can make any garbage doctrines out of God's simple truth. No one can find godly truth and wisdom from what men made, because we are absolutely wicked without Jesus.

*Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*

Hold fast, endure hardship, continue, and preach the Word. A good set of marching orders, don't you think?